**How reliable and useful is the source as evidence for the success of Americas reconstruction of Japan between 1945 and 1951?**

The source focuses on MacArthur’s view of the situation Japan was in in 1951. He talks of the changes wrought on Japan being the “greatest recorded in modern history,” as the country has risen from the desolation it was left in at the end of the Second World War, to be a country dedicated to liberty and dignity. He makes it clear that these qualities are benefitted and being exhibited on an individual, personal level, but that it is the “system” (ie, government) that is bringing these things to the people of Japan. He makes it clear that it is the Japanese people that have been instrumental in bringing about this in Japan (rather than American intervention), and that it has been by a very positive manner that this transformation has been achieved, by a “commendable will, eagerness to learn, and a marked capacity to understand” on the part of the Japanese people. The result of this action by the Japanese people is an extremely positive one, as it had produced an impressive political organisation, one that is truly representative (and therefore a clear democracy), and committed to creating a positive, forward thinking society, with all that entails – morality, justice, and free enterprise.

One of the main implications of his message is that (obviously) Japan has become a modern, democratic and forward thinking state. Given the space of time and the reference made to the damage Japan suffered in the war, it is clear that MacArthur is saying that the transformation is an impressive one, but that it is also one that has been driven by the people of Japan. The obvious and immediate implication of this is that it was *not* American intervention that brought this about, although I believe an argument could be made, based on my own knowledge (see below), that his final line could be argued to be cleverly tailored – “In the process” (of the Japanese creating a system dedicated etc), “a truly representative government has been made.” He does not here say that this “truly representative government” *has* actually been created by the Japanese.

This conclusion can be reached by looking at the context of the source, and particularly, General MacArthur himself. MacArthur had been the leader of the American occupation forces in Japan, and had, despite the existence of the four power allied council, essentially been responsible for what had happened in Japan. He was therefore a man with a good deal of knowledge of what was going on, but crucially also would have had an agenda: As the supreme commander allied forces, it would be he who took the flak should affairs in Japan take a turn for the worse, especially at a crucial time such as this – With the Korean War raging from 1950, and the fall of China to Communism in 1949, Japan was now crucial to American interests in South East Asia, forming as it did a key part of the Pacific Rim Defensive Strategy. At such a crucial time of the Cold War, it was in his interests that his actions in Japan should be presented in the best possible light. This is doubly so when we consider his audience – The American Congress who were authorising his funding.

It must also be borne in mind that this speech followed five years of development, which had seen a considerable shift in American Policy towards Japan, from a subdued client state to a (soon to be) independent state with its own economy and army – A far cry from what America had originally intended with its defeated foe. MacArthur would therefore have to justify this shift in his speech, hence his clear focus on the input of the Japanese people themselves (as opposed to American intervention) in the transformation of Japan. After all, considering that Japan would soon be granted its independence (with certain boundaries), it was clearly in MacArthur’s interests to sell the Japanese as a people who were ready and capable, and who could be trusted to, run their own country.

It would therefore seem that the reliability and usefulness of this piece of evidence when considering the success of American policy should be called into question. I know from my own knowledge that the transformation in Japan was not a solely Japanese affair, despite the implication of MacArthur’s address. It was not the Japanese who created “a system dedicated to the individual liberty and personal dignity,” it was the American intervention that achieved this. America enforced democracy on Japan in its own interests (to ensure the country would not fall to Communism), and it achieved this by way of their own military control – The Japanese had little choice in the matter, especially in the aftermath of their defeat, and it was clearly American-style Democracy that was being imposed – A far cry from the rigid authoritarianism of the Japanese Imperial state. Every decision made was a response to American desires, such as the ending of the Zaibatsu privileges, and the control of members of government (evidenced by the American imposed limitation on Militarists in Governmental roles). This suggests that we cannot treat this source as a reliable piece of evidence for the success of America’s reconstruction of Japan, as the implications of what MacArthur is saying are a far cry from the truth of the matter.

Another key issue that is worth discussion is MacArthur’s claim that Japan now has a “truly representative government.” He has forgotten, it seems, the 1949 “Red Purge” of any element of the Japanese society suspected of harbouring communist ideals or sympathies, particularly those attached to Trade Unions (a clear mirror of the McCarthyism that was sweeping America). American Containment policy was being clearly applied within Japan, and was a far cry from the “social justice” MacArthur speaks of. Likewise, “political morality” is hardly expressed in the American ban on strike action by Japanese workers, nor the American restrictions on Japanese officials actually being allowed to control the day to day running of their own country. These elements suggest that this source is not useful evidence for the success of American Reconstruction in Japan, as he is obviously omitting crucial details that would argue against that very success.

That is not to say that this source does not have its usefulness. There is strong evidence to suggest MacArthur is accurate in his claims that the Japanese undertook the reformation with “commendable will etc,” as it seems clear from contemporary accounts that the Japanese were keen to adopt all aspects of American culture (even as far as dress and social attitudes), and considered Democracy a great freedom after the Imperial system. It is not therefore surprising that they embraced the transformation. Likewise, it can be argued that the spirit of what he is claiming is largely true – Japan was ready to receive its “independence,” regardless of how controlled that may have been, and had undergone a great transformation in the five years following the war. For the most part, there was freedom of economic enterprise. Prime Minister Shigeru of Japan been successful in his economic growth policy, and the Korean War in particular showed how far the Japanese economy had come, capable as it was of supplying the American forces in Japan with some $500,000,000 worth of war materials.

However, overall, I would conclude that this source is not wholly useful as evidence for the success of American Reconstruction of Japan. There are too many omissions and inaccuracies for us to be able to trust this source as a piece of evidence, despite the elements of truth it contains. MacArthur had an agenda to meet, and therefore (unsurprisingly) presented this speech in such a way as to suit that agenda – to convince congress that he had achieved his goal, and particularly that Japan had risen by its own endeavours to a point where it could assume independence. It was his goal to talk up Japan as ready to assume its place as a vital and much needed ally (rather than client) in South-East Asia, and so he clearly had his reasons to twist the facts to suit his purpose. It is for this reason that I would argue that this source is not a useful piece of evidence for the success of America’s reconstruction of Japan.